

STATEMENT OF REP. JOHN CONYERS, JR.
Committee on the Judiciary
H. Res. 420, Resolution of Inquiry to
Attorney General Regarding CIA Leak
September 14, 2005

We are here because the Bush administration refuses to police itself in the midst of criminal and ethical misconduct. We are here because this Congress continues to turn a blind eye to the wrongdoing of this administration. In July 2003, over two years ago, a Bush administration official committed one of the most serious breaches of national security in recent history by disclosing to the press the identity of an undercover Central Intelligence Agency operative. Even worse, it likely was done for political reasons, to retaliate against the operative's husband for successfully challenging the President's claim that Iraq had sought nuclear material in Africa.

The purpose of this resolution is to get to the bottom of what happened and why the Justice Department slow-walked the investigation at the beginning. We know that, despite urgent pleas from the CIA for a criminal investigation into the leaker, the Justice Department and White House dragged their feet. The Department waited three days before notifying the White House of the breach and subsequent investigation. The White House, then waited eleven hours before telling staff to preserve evidence.

Despite these serious irregularities, early last year, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle rejected this same measure. They apparently did not believe that the Judiciary Committee, whose job it is to police the Justice Department, should look into a national security breach and delayed investigation.

There have been significant developments in the case since that time that I believe should lead them to support it this time. First, for the past two years, the White House has denied that any of its top officials, namely Deputy White House Chief of Staff Karl Rove, vice presidential Chief of Staff I. Lewis Libby, or National Security Council official Elliot Abrams, were involved in any way in the leak of Mrs. Wilson's covert identity. We now know that both Karl Rove and Lewis Libby spoke to reporters about Mrs. Wilson's identity.

Second, when the Justice Department first started investigating, the President made it clear that he would fire anyone involved in the leak. But when it became clear that his top political advisor, Mr. Rove, was implicated, he changed his ethical standards. This past July, the President said he would fire someone only if that person "committed a crime," raising the bar for firing someone like Mr. Rove.

Further, we now know that then-Attorney General John Ashcroft insisted on being briefed on Department interviews of Mr. Rove that were conducted in connection with the leak. He did so despite his long-standing ties to Mr. Rove; Mr. Ashcroft had paid Mr. Rove almost \$750,000 for work on several campaigns. That Mr. Ashcroft eventually recused himself demonstrates there were conflicts of interest with his continued involvement.

It is time for Congress to exercise its duty to oversee the Executive Branch. Some will claim that we should not look into a matter that is being investigated by the Justice Department. That is not and has never been our standard. This year alone, Congress has held hearings on allegations of criminal misconduct in the United Nation's Oil-for-Food Program; the same misconduct being reviewed by the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York. Congress also has been looking into the Jack Abramoff scandal at the same time as the Justice Department.

Let us not forget the endless hearings in this Committee and others on alleged Clinton-Gore campaign finance violations, the Whitewater claims, and Clinton White House Travel Office firings. These were matters all under Justice Department review at the time of our hearings.

Finally, I must remind my colleagues of the numerous House and Senate hearings on Watergate that were simultaneous with the Justice Department's own investigation.

I urge my colleagues vote "Yes" on this resolution.